



# Decorative with Dahlias

PHOTO HISU LEE/UNSPLASH

## DAHLIAS THRIVE IN WELL-DRAINED SOIL AND SUNSHINE

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Master Gardener

**Q**uestion: I recently went to the Douglas County Dahlia Society show at the fairgrounds and was so impressed by the beautiful blooms. Any tips on growing my own dahlias?

**Answer:** Who doesn't love these vibrant-hued, showy, late-summer flowers that come in an endless array of sizes, shapes and colors? Native to Mexico, dahlias were first discovered by the explorer Cortez, who found them growing in the gardens of the Aztecs in the early 16th century. Subsequently named in honor of the famous Swedish botanist Andreas Dahl, dahlias have been gracing gardens around the world ever since.

Growing dahlias is fairly easy if you give them what they like – sun, well-drained soil, a low-nitrogen fertilizer – and keep them free of slugs, earwigs

and other pests. These flowers grow from tubers, and their roots tend to be shallow. Plant the tubers from mid-April through June, after a chance of frost is past, in a well-drained soil in full sun.

Add a small handful of bone meal in the hole first, and then place the tubers with the growing “eyes” up, 4 to 6 inches deep and 18 to 24 inches apart. The crowns should be just above the soil line. Don't water right after planting – instead, wait until the sprouts appear above the soil to water. Keep the soil moist, not soggy. Their fleshy tubers are prone to rot if waterlogged. Deep water your dahlias two to three times a week during the summer season.

As these fast-growing plants grow, feed them monthly with a fertilizer with a low first number, such as 5-10-10 (tomato fertilizers fit the bill just fine). Put stakes in the ground at the time of planting if your chosen variety are large-flowered.

Pinch or cut the center shoot just above the third set of leaves to promote shorter, bushier plants that provide better stems for cutting. To use in arrangements, cut blossoms when they are fully open and place immediately into warm water, changing the vase water

every two to three days to prolong the life of the cut dahlias. Remove faded blooms during the summer months to encourage continuous blooming.

After the first frost knocks them down, it's time to gently dig up the dahlia tubers. First, cut the stalks to about 6 inches, and then gently lift the tubers from the soil with a spade, being careful not to break the necks. Wash off the dirt and allow them to air dry, avoiding direct sun. Pack the tubers in crates or cardboard boxes lined with layers of newspaper, arranging them in sand, peat moss or dry sawdust. Never store them in sealed plastic bags, where they would rot. Store them in a cool, dry area, checking them periodically during the winter to discard any rotted tubers.

Come spring, when it's easier to see the growing eyes on the crowns of the tubers, divide them using a sharp knife so that each section has at least one tuber and one eye. And, you're ready to fill your garden with color again.

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*Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), 541- 672-4461, 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.*

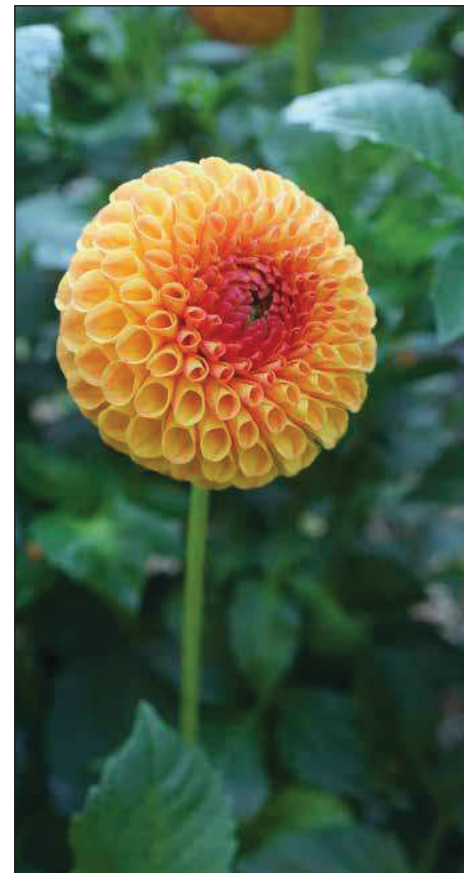


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Dahlias were named after Andreas Dahl, a famous Swedish botanist.